

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT  
BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS  
PUBLIC HEARING  
APRIL 8, 2013**

**ATTENDANCE:** Angel dePara, Co-Chair; Susan Brannelly, Co-chair; AmyMarie Vizzo-Paniccia; Carlos Silva; Denese Taylor-Moye; Lydia Martinez

**OTHERS:** Council Member Steven Stafstrom, Jr.; Council President Thomas McCarthy Council Member Andre Baker (7:19 p.m.)

**CALL TO ORDER.**

Council Member dePara called the budget public hearing to order at 6:15 p.m. A quorum was present. He introduced those Committee and Council members.

Mr. Jim Fox of Seaside Avenue came forward to address the Committee. He said that he was concerned about the budget and the potential rise in taxes. Many residents are retired and on fixed incomes. They simply can't afford anymore taxes. Mr. Fox said that he was afraid that Bridgeport was on the same path to bankruptcy like Stockton, California. He displayed a print out of an open letter dated July 24, 2012 from the Mayor of Stockton about the City of Stockton's Chapter 9 Bankruptcy Protection. Mr. Fox said that he pays over \$9,000 in taxes and received very few services. (See Attachment #1-Stockton)

Mr. Charlie Gulotta of Sailor's Lane came forward. He said that he had moved to Bridgeport eight years ago because he felt that Bridgeport has potential. He said that while the City has Seaside Park, a deep water harbor and many other assets but all he's seen is the taxes going up. He said that the Council members have to work on efficiencies rather than raising taxes. He said that he worked with the Urban League. He then said that because 60% of the Council are City Council members, it had produced a no work culture.

Mr. Rick Torres, of Millard Street, came forward and greeting everyone. For many residents in the City, it is getting to the point where they will be forced out. He said that he does not want to leave the City, but many of the houses in his neighborhood and other areas of the City have underwater mortgages.

Mr. Torres said that he understands the Council's issues but pointed out that when companies want to come into Connecticut, the State and the towns give these companies tax breaks. When companies consider Bridgeport, they see all the empty buildings, but they also are aware of the high taxes. Lowering taxes is imperative. Bridgeport is desperate and the Tax rate will be the Council's choice.

Mr. David Walker came forward and said that he has been a resident of Black Rock for a number of years and also has a business in the City. He said that he would be willing to help the Committee. He said that the unfunded liabilities for Bridgeport were three to four times higher than Stockton. This means that if things do not change, Bridgeport will go bankrupt. He said that it is imperative that the Council hold the line. The Mayor's budget will increase the taxes.

He suggested a few things among them: if the State eliminates the car tax, the City adjust the properties accordingly, freeze City hiring, freeze all benefits and cut back non-essential personnel, tightly controlling the police and fire. The Council annual stipend is the highest in the State. Outside legal fees need to be cut. Conduct an independent audit.

Council Member dePara informed Mr. Walker that his time had expired and requested that he submit a document with his suggestions in writing.

Mr. John Marshal Lee came forward and thanked the Committee for holding three public hearings. The current proposal is a 6% tax increase. He said that he was concerned that the Council was underserved by not having a legislative aide.

He then requested the Committee members to open to page 7 in the budget book. He said that the Mayor's letter had failed to identify the City's priorities, like the Capital budget for school building. He asked where the chart listing the positions in the City. He said that it was not in the budget book this year. He asked Council Member Brannelly why she was smiling and why there was no dialog.

Council Member Brannelly replied that this was a public hearing and was not a dialog. It was for the citizens to speak and for the Council Members to listen.

Mr. Lee asked why people had not asked questions about the audit and there was no transparency regarding obtaining information.

Mr. Lee asked about the flat funding for the BOE and whether it was actually a flat funding.

Another resident came forward and said that it was the council's member's job to represent the residents of the City. As representative of the people, the Council Members were elected to work on this. He said that he had been hearing the Mayor say that it was only about \$50/month. He then reviewed how much he has paid in taxes and compared it to areas in Florida and South Carolina. The Council has to hold the line on taxes. When he is in City Hall, he does not see anyone moving quickly.

Ms. Sharon Delameci, came forward and said that she was not a business person, but was a Senior Citizen. She said that when she read that the mill rate was going up 2.5%, she didn't realize how much that would affect her taxes. When she moved in, she was paying \$12,000 now she is paying over \$18,000 so that she can stay. She is a widow on a fixed income.

Mr. Gerarid came forward and said that he endorsed what has been already said. He said that two years ago he had mentioned that there was a song in the musical Oklahoma titled "We've Gone About As Far As We Can Go." Now, the City has gone beyond that. He offered his services to the Council Members.

After he retired from being a New York attorney, he moved to Bridgeport. He said that CT does not have a mortgage tax and proceeded to explain how this one time tax of 1%, which the bank pays 25% and the home owner pays 75%. At the time, Mayor Finch was a State legislator, and requested Mr. G. to draft up legislation. Mr. G did but nothing was ever done. If this was done, the State would have a new source of revenue. He said that mortgages of over one million dollars would be paid by the other towns who send their poor and needy to Bridgeport for services.

Council Member dePara asked Mr. Gerarid if he could provide the Committee with a copy of the proposed mortgage tax legislation. Mr. Gerarid said that he would look for that document.

Mr. Robert Halstead came forward and said that he had been involved in the City for some time and that in the past, there had been strong efforts to increase the City's tax base. He suggested moving the offices from 999 Broad Street back to Lyon Terrace. He said that the historic landmarks on the East Side were just sitting there. Economic Development should be working harder to move the City forward.

Ms. Beverly Ballast came forward of Capital Street. She said that she had moved here about five year ago, she hasn't seen much improvement. The Directors of Economic Development have not been able to bring much to the City of Bridgeport. As a business person, she is amazed that simple things such as leaf collection and potholes are not being addressed. She said that she was present to ask

Ms. Mary Jane Foster of Black Rock came forward and said that she hoped the Council Members would get the feel of how desperate the taxpayers are feeling. She said that it would be good to take to heart the recommendation by Mr. Walker. If the taxes go through a 6%, the taxes will have tripled in less than 10 years. Ms. Foster said that while she loves the City, but she would have to reconsider. She encouraged the Committee members to do their very best

Mr. John Slater, RTC Chairman, came forward and introduced himself. He spoke about how his family struggled to remain in their home. His mother has recently sold the family home at a loss and moved to Fairfield where she rents. He said that Bridgeport has been a one party rule, and that the Council needs to remember there are many people whose homes are underwater. He asked that the Committee to try to keep every single person who spoke in their homes.

A female resident came forward and spoke about how she was proud to be from Bridgeport. She said that Bridgeport is already one of the highest tax cities in the nation. She said that it was common sense and there were good citizens who were willing to help out. She said that she knows people who will not be able to stay in the City if the taxes go up.

Mr. Michael Nevens came forward. He said that he attended the recent meeting at Black Rock School with the Mayor. The Mayor spoke about bringing new jobs to Bridgeport. By bringing four new high schools, it is an addition. He then spoke about the G.E. parcel and the parcel went for a new school, which came off the tax rolls. It's time to stop spending.

Mr. Nevens then spoke about the housing and the adult education issues, both of which have been static. However the Mayor and other administrators receive high salaries. He then spoke about the fair market wages, which are really union jobs. It is a major cost increase. Non union workers cost less. He concluded by saying that he expected the Council Members to do something

Ms. Nancy Prater came forward and said that she was a secondary teacher. Her husband is working three jobs. This is a bad economy and the houses are underwater. Talking about raising taxes is unbelievable. She said that for the teachers and the mothers in Bridgeport, she was pleading that the taxes not be raised.

Ms. Mary Filio came forward and said that the property taxes were unbelievable. She was very disturbed by the billboards. Her mother worked very hard to pay for a house and send her children to private school. Now that the house is paid for, her mother can't afford to live in it. Her mother had no place to go. She said that she was here to request that the Council not make this bad situation worse. It's time to give the residents a reason to stay.

Mr. Gonzalez came forward and said that he was present because of his concerns about the taxes. He's been a home owner in Bridgeport for almost 35 years. He raised five children and he and his wife are senior citizens. He lives in the Hollow, but has not seen much progress at all. There have been many new apartment buildings done in downtown. There is very little revenue coming into the City. Main Street is covered with graffiti and it looks like a ghetto.

Mr. Gonzalez said that he believed there were enough officers on the police force right now. He then said that during the summer the parked police cars are running all the time with the air conditioners on, and in the winter, they are running the heaters. This costs money and the taxpayers have to pay for it.

*Council Member Baker joined the meeting at 7:19 p.m.*

Ms. Liz Wexler came forward and said that she has lived here for 8 years. She said that she made a decision to buy here because it looked like there opportunity. Her taxes have increased almost 40% and now she's stuck. The City Council members need to help the citizens who are stuck in bad situation because they can't afford to live in their own homes now.

Another resident said that there were under utilized assets in the City and that the Arena had a tournament here recently. He went on to say that the Council needed to work on utilizing the assets to bring business to the City.

Mr. Nevens came forward and said that with the taxes so high, the businesses were moving out. There used to be tax free zones and perhaps the Council needs to consider increasing the tax free zones, like the old Remington building.

It was suggested that the Committee members have name plates for easier identification.

Council Member dePara asked if there was anyone else who wished to address the Committee members at this time. No one came forward. He repeated his request again. No one came forward. Council Member dePara asked again if anyone else wished to address the Committee members. No one came forward.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER TAYLOR MOYE MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER BRANNELLY SECONDED.**

**\*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon L. Soltes  
Telesco Secretarial Services